DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 320 442 FL 018 606

AUTHOR Lambert, Richard D.
TITLE The National Foreign Language System. NFLC Occasional Papers.
INSTITUTION Johns Hopkins Univ., Washington, DC. National Foreign Language Center.
PUB DATE Jun 89
NOTE 13p.
AVAILABLE FROM Cashier, National Foreign Language Center, 1619 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036 ($3.00 including postage and handling; checks payable to NFLC).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Objectives; *Educational Policy; Educational Practices; Instructional Effectiveness; Language Research; *Second Language Instruction; *Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS *United States

ABSTRACT

Structural features of the United States' foreign language teaching system are sketched, focusing on ways that different activities and organizations in foreign language instruction form a de facto national system and the extent to which the system serves the national need for a large, diverse pool of highly proficient second language users. The overall demand for foreign language competency is outlined, and goals of language instruction in the educational system are discussed. It is suggested that the formal educational system currently serves the goal of language use in adult life only indirectly, and that the federal government and proprietary vendors are the major sources of direct use-oriented language instruction. Suggestions for managing the national system and overcoming inadequacies, including lateral and vertical discontinuities and western European bias, are offered. It is concluded that for a more foreign language-competent society, systematic national planning and development must occur. Common standards must be set, strategies for matching individual needs to appropriate training have to be established, and subsystems must be coordinated and articulated. Above all, direct national attention must be paid to raising the occupational demand for and use of languages, and the level of skills taught and acquired should be raised. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

R. Lambert

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE SYSTEM

Richard D. Lambert
National Foreign Language Center

COMPLIMENTARY COPY

June 1989

FL018606

About the Author

Richard D. Lambert is director of the National Foreign Language Center at The Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C., professor emeritus of Sociology and South Asian Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, and editor of *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. He is the author of *Points of Leverage: An Agenda for a National Foundation for International Studies, Beyond Growth; The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies*, and *The Transformation of an Indian Labor Market: The Case of Pune*. Dr. Lambert has just completed a massive two-year survey of undergraduate international education in the United States for the American Council on Education; the survey will be published in September 1989.

About the *Occasional Papers*

This is the sixth in a series of *Occasional Papers* published by the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC).

NFLC prints and distributes as *Occasional Papers* articles on a wide variety of topics related to foreign language research, education, and policy. The papers are read by an internal review committee. The *Occasional Papers* are intended to serve as a vehicle of communication and stimulant for discussion among groups concerned with these topic areas. The views expressed in these papers are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of NFLC or of The Johns Hopkins University.

Copyright 1989, The National Foreign Language Center
at The Johns Hopkins University

The National Foreign Language System

RICHARD D. LAMBERT

National Foreign Language Center

Much has been written and said about the need for improvements in the instructional and learning process, per se, in foreign language education. I will not use this occasion to contribute to that discussion. Rather, I bring to the debate about how best to improve our nation's foreign language competency the perspective of a sociologist of language instruction, a concern with the organization of foreign language teaching rather than its technology, with structural issues rather than pedagogical issues. My personal interest is in overall organizational structure, the ways in which the many different activities and organizations in foreign language instruction add up to our de facto national system, and the extent to which that system serves our national need for a large, diverse pool of highly proficient second language users. While not disputing the importance of continuing to address important pedagogical issues, I hope through this paper to call the attention of the foreign language profession to the ways in which structure and organization of the instructional system can either facilitate or impede effective instruction.

In my view, many of the reasons we have not been successful at fulfilling this national need are not the result of poor classroom instruction but of ambiguities and inefficiencies in the *organization* of foreign language instruction that limit the effectiveness of even the most gifted teacher, using the most effective teaching technology, teaching the brightest students. In the course of two national surveys—one of college-level language instruction in 42 institutions and the other of the introduction of Chinese into 60 high schools—we have encountered many, many dedicated and effective language teachers. The problems we have identified arise not so much in individual classrooms, but in the way in which the parts fit together.

In particular, many problems arise from a confusion, or rather a multiplicity, of the goals of language instruction and the relationship between those goals and instruction and, ultimately, actual outcomes. In view of our changing position in the world environment, we need a fresh teleology of language instruction and a much more sophisticated, a much more particularized view of how to structure the content and style of language instruction for different purposes and clienteles. Many of the countries of Europe and Asia, with their tradition of centralized planning and control of all aspects of education, are engaged in just such macro-analysis and planning, fitting the various pieces together in a more coherent way. In our dispersed and essentially laissez-faire educational system, the need for such sorting out of goals and instructional programs of language teaching is both more difficult and more essential.

THE DEMAND FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMPETENCY

The need to sort out and prioritize instructional goals would not be so pressing if we in the United States had the same traditions and implicit motivation for learning foreign languages as do most Europeans. There the formal educational system can operate on the assumption that most educated adults will have frequent occasion to utilize a language other than their mother tongue in some fashion or other. Their presumption that second language skills will, in fact, be used by large sections of the adult population means that there need be no debate about implicit goals for language learning. Moreover, the ubiquity of this presumed need makes the formal educational system the logical place to deliver this instruction for all citizens. The only issues are how many other languages should be learned; which ones—

increasingly, of course, the primary second language is English; and how long should they be studied.

The American situation is patently different from that in Europe. As a society we are not constantly bombarded by communications in foreign languages as are people in other countries, so that the usefulness of foreign language competencies for very general purposes is not self-evident to the American public. Very few of us routinely read literature, listen to the radio, watch television or go to the movies, or speak with friends in other languages. Hence, the overriding feature of foreign language instruction in the United States is that it operates in a climate of very limited utilization of foreign language skills by adults, in particular very limited occupational demand for the linguistic skills of those Americans who do have language competencies. Overall, we are a devoutly monolingual society, wishing we were linguistically homogeneous internally, and expecting, even demanding, that citizens of other countries speak English when they want to communicate with us.

Part of the problem for American foreign language teachers is that foreigners accede to our wishes. The willingness of elites in the rest of the world to learn English is both a boon and a curse to us. Indeed, without that willingness—and it is not likely to last forever—we would not just be noncompetitive, we would be out of the game. If Japanese were not so difficult a language to learn, English as the lingua franca might be facing a challenge even now.

Given the prevalence of English abroad and the lack of a tradition of adult use of foreign languages in the United States, the implicit rationale for the study of foreign languages in the American setting is weak. Lectures delivered at tiresome length by internationalists about how small the world is, and how interdependent our society has become, do not convince anyone but other internationalists about the need for foreign language competencies. Or rather, they are not sufficiently convincing to motivate very many individuals to invest the immense time and effort required to get a truly usable foreign language skill. Relatively few adult Americans will get an opportunity to use a foreign language skill if they do acquire it, and most of them will watch it erode into distant memory as the years go by. In view of this situation, Americans do not share the Europeans' strong cultural assumption that our formal educational system should be permeated by foreign language instruction.

Nor, in spite of our frequent sermons about the danger to our international competitiveness of our English language blinders, have we convinced very many employers that they should seek out and hire those who have second language competency. We at the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) are in the midst of a major review of the ways in which American corporations deal with foreign language needs when they do arise. As part of that review, Carol Fixman, previously responsible for international education at the American Academy of Collegiate Schools of Business, conducted for us in-depth interviews with 32 international managers and training officers in nine corporations of various sizes and products. Her report, published in the NFLC's Occasional Papers series,[1] explores corporate language needs and usages in some detail. Here are a few words from that report on the American corporate market for foreign language skills:

> In general, businesspeople whom I interviewed tended to view a foreign language as divorced from its cultural context. Most had experienced first-hand difficulties arising from different management styles in various parts of the world. They saw cross-cultural understanding as important for doing business in a global economy. However, few considered knowledge of a foreign language a key element in this understanding. . . . This short-term, mechanical value attributed to foreign languages predominated in the comments of most of my interview partners. Many pointed out that foreign languages did not actually present a problem, since they could be "managed." In other words, when need arose, appropriate skills could be located.

Fixman goes on to detail some variations on this general theme of low evaluation of foreign language skills per se. It varies by country. For instance, all interviewers admitted that Japan was a special case where the need for language skills is strong. In addition, the need varies by the size and function or product of the corporation. Multinationals by and large deal with each other, and in English, while service companies and small and medium-sized companies feel the need for employees with foreign language skills. The need varies according to whether an international company insists on a consistent corporate culture throughout the enterprise, since that usually means the use of English for all internal communications. It varies by the level of employee—in general the need for foreign language skills is greater for the lower level employees than for manager—and by employee function—those dealing directly with customers or local employees need foreign language skills. But overall, the felt need for foreign language competencies was low.

Another perspective on this matter derives from another survey in which the NFLC is currently engaged. In the face of this low expressed demand, what happens when people who have been highly trained in both business skills and foreign languages seek employment? Do they make their own market? To test this, we are conducting a survey of on-job foreign language use among graduates of three programs that combine a master's in business administration (MBA) with advanced language training, the Wharton School's Lauder Institute of International Management, The University of South Carolina's Master in International Business, and the Monterey Institute's combined MBA and International Studies degree. We will soon publish the complete results of this study. Some preliminary results are available now. At this time, the Wharton School returns

are most complete, and they show that about half of those graduates report that their foreign language skill plays an important role in their job performance. The Lauder program is fairly recent in origin; it has graduated only three classes. The University of Carolina's Master of International Business program, which also mixes language and business education, has been in operation for more than 15 years: initial returns from graduates show a similar pattern. About half of them (52 percent) indicated that their foreign language competency was important in securing their first job after graduation; and 46 percent that it was important in subsequent jobs as well. However, the degree of importance went down, not up: 36 percent reported their language competency as very important in their first job compared with only 21 percent in subsequent jobs. Only 23 percent of all respondents said that a foreign language competency was a factor in promotions, and 7 percent said that it brought them extra pay. If creating a supply of MBAs with training in foreign languages as well as business skills will increase corporate appreciation and demand for language skills, its effect is still to come.

Recently, I ran into another curious example of low evaluation of foreign language skills, this time in a place where one would have expected that the lack of such skills would have been almost totally disabling. A recent report[2] commenting on the sudden explosion in the need for Russian-speaking personnel to carry out effectively on-site inspection under the new U.S.-Soviet Union Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Reduction (INF) treaty contains a long lament that the Russian language needs in the recruitment and training personnel seem to have a low priority in planning. Quoting from the report:

> With the INF Treaty, DOD assumed a radically new mission. However, no effort has been made to adjust service end-strengths and force structures to accommodate this new mission. Service personnel structures focus on functional specialization rather on language capability. In all services, "linguist" is an additional skill identifier rather than a primary specialty. None of the services has a linguist specialty.

THE GOALS OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN THE FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

It is difficult to ascertain whether this low level of demand for or appreciation of foreign language competencies in the adult world is the cause or the product of the situation in our formal educational system wherein language learning is only very indirectly related to the use to which language skill will be put in later life. To the extent to which the goal of language learning is use oriented at all, the implicit assumption is that if we give students a foreign language competency while they are in school, some of them may use it in their adult lives. Given the relatively low priority and lack of specificity of this goal it is not surprising that there are very few investigations of the extent to which alumni do, in fact, retain and use their language skills. Nor is much attention given to language maintenance or rejuvenation after the completion of formal education. This is not to say that some teachers do not teach usable skills well or that some students do not acquire them. Nor does it mean that the goal in individual classrooms or programs is not the production of language skills for communication should the need arise. Nor does it mean that parts of the system—for instance the education of language majors or of graduate area specialists, or preparatory courses for study abroad—do not visualize the direct use of a language skill. But the system as a whole is not use directed, with the possible exception of a preparation for an appreciation of literature.

This lack of a direct utilitarian orientation of much of language instruction in the formal educational system means that educational purposes other than actual use of language skills tend to be emphasized. For instance, some view language instruction as a way to deparochialize large parts of our citizenry so that they can develop an empathetic understanding of other cultures and societies.[3] This argument resembles that used for universal science education aimed at producing scientific literacy, not the ability to "do" science. Others look inward and view language instruction as a contribution to the maintenance of an egalitarian, multicultural society. Still others look on foreign language instruction as another humanity like history or art appreciation whose goals are diffuse and educational in the broadest definition of that term.

When these less utilitarian goals are adopted, either explicitly or implicitly, as they are in much high school and collegiate foreign language instruction, difficult questions arise about how much and what kind of instruction should be given to what kind of student in which languages. Moreover, it is essential that means of maximizing and evaluating the contribution of language learning to these goals be developed.

If, however, the goal is actual use of the language in adult real life communication, if we as a nation need to produce a larger supply of fully competent second language users who will apply their foreign language skills in the conduct of their professions or in other forms of adult level utilization, this must become an explicit and high priority goal of a significant proportion of the language instructional system in the United States. It calls for the creation of effective programs that lie beyond formal education, programs designed to keep school-learned languages alive or resuscitate or hone them for actual use when they are needed. And equally importantly, national attention must be paid to enhancing the demand side of the equation, to the enhancement of the actual use of foreign languages in our society, so that more students will share the language teaching community's belief in the utility of foreign language acquisition. Addressing the demand side is, of course, not the exclusive or even primarily the responsibility of the language teaching profession. It calls for attitudinal and behavioral changes in the society as a whole.

DIRECT USE-ORIENTED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

While foreign language instruction in the formal educational system is usually only distantly related to a specific use of language skills, there are two important parts of our national language instructional system that do train for direct language utilization. As I will note, they are very loosely connected, if at all, to language instruction in the formal educational system. The two use-oriented systems are: first, a set of language instructional institutions within the federal government serving primarily the needs of federal employees; second, the proprietary vendors of language instruction who serve primarily the needs of business and individual adult learners. We know something of the first of these. The NFLC is just beginning to map out the second.

The Federal Government System[4]

It should be noted that not all governmental language instruction is use oriented. The goals of foreign language instruction in the service academies resemble those on civilian college campuses. While they do tend to have more resources than their civilian counterparts, particularly in the availability of high-tech equipment to assist language learning, their indirect relationship to later use of language competencies is similar to the situation in the general educational system.

The best known of the government language schools are, however, very use oriented. The federal government-operated foreign language school that serves the broadest range of government agencies is the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which produces about 1,300 graduates annually. While most of its students are Department of State employees heading for overseas assignments, it also provides language training for other government agencies. For instance, it trains about 200 Department of Defense (DOD) students annually, mainly those who will serve as military attachés in U.S. embassies. The principal language trainer for the Department of Defense is the Defense Language Institute (DLI). It produces 4,500 graduates annually, about 70 percent of whom will serve as listeners in signals intelligence. Since its establishment 45 years ago, it has graduated about 150,000 students. In addition, language training schools are maintained by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Language Training Division and the Language and Target Studies Department of the National Cryptological School (NCS). The latter adds supplemental language training, largely in listening skills, to graduates of DLI. The number of students trained in the CIA and NCS schools is classified, but is considerably smaller than those enrolled in FSI and DLI. The federal government also maintains a number of advanced language teaching schools overseas. FSI operates schools in Japan, Taiwan, and North Africa. The U.S. Army maintains a Russian Institute which provides two years of training beyond what is provided by DLI to about 20 students per year, and a Foreign Language Training Center in Europe which provides six week refresher/enhancement courses in Russian, Czech, German, and Polish to about 550 students annually.

The advantages of the government-based system are well known.[5] Its orientation toward actual use of the language removes all debate about the purpose of language learning. There are still debates about the degree of specialization of language training to be given to those preparing to go into different jobs. For instance, should very general language competencies in all four skills—reading, listening, speaking, and writing—be taught, or should training be limited to the skills that are most likely to be used? Since 70 percent of the graduates of DLI and almost all of the NCS trainees will be used as listeners in electronic surveillance, the natural tendency is to stress receptive rather than productive skills. Should an attempt be made to teach sublanguages rather than general language skills? The vocabulary at DLI tends to be heavily tilted to military usage. FSI, on the other hand, tends to emphasize oral production skills, and a much wider range of vocabulary and registers. A further difficulty, particularly in the Department of Defense, is the necessity to admit students whose language learning aptitude is considered less than optimal, and to operate what has been described as a revolving door training system. Given the brevity of enlistment times, DLI must constantly train fresh personnel just to keep force strengths even. Moreover, few trainees remain in the service long enough to develop very high levels of language competency.

However, federal language teaching systems have real advantages. Compared to their counterparts in the formal educational system, government language schools can assume motivation on the part of the students, although not all enlisted men—about 80 percent of the students—and officers in DLI have equal enthusiasm. Outside of FSI, where a substantial proportion of the students are trying to learn a language at the same time making other preparations for a foreign assignment, students in government schools can focus almost exclusively on language learning. The only academic programs that I know of that have this luxury are the summer programs at centers like Middlebury, or the Title VI centers, academic-year-long Falcon programs in intensive Japanese, Chinese, and Indonesian at Cornell, and study abroad programs in a variety of locations overseas. On the campus, intensive usually means about five to ten hours of language instruction per week[6]; in the most use-oriented government programs it is full time.

Proprietary Vendors

We know almost nothing about a very substantial section of the national language teaching system, the world of proprietary vendors. They vary in size from international giants such as Berlitz, which has 85 branches in the United States and another 150 scattered throughout the world, to the swarm of individual tutors selling their services by the hour. These proprietary

language schools and tutors are abundant enough so that one of our interviewees in a major corporation indicated that his mail is constantly inundated with flyers of language vendors. In a typical week he received at least 15 telephone calls offering services. There are 30 language schools listed in the Washington, D.C., Yellow Pages alone and countless more around the country. In the main, these schools concentrate on the teaching of the European languages, although many indicate that they will teach anything—that is, anything for which they can find a native speaker to fill the classroom. The government uses them primarily for the more exotic languages for which agencies do not want to maintain teaching facilities themselves. Some vendors have a special patented methodological wrinkle or some dramatic learning aid from violins to brain wave stimulators. The airline magazines are full of their advertisements. The excesses of some of the outrageous claims one finds in the ads of the less responsible vendors unfortunately obscure the fact that this vast network provides a vital service in the use-oriented sector of our national system. Its growth is an almost pure measure of national demand for foreign language competency, much more accurate than school and college language enrollments where coercion plays such an important role. It is a pity that we know so little about it. The NFLC has just begun to develop an inventory and taxonomy of such vendors.

In general, the proprietary vendor system has its own personnel and style of operation, and points toward utilitarian goals in its instruction. It has almost nothing to do with the formal educational system, although there are several highly publicized stories of commercial vendors having local school systems as clients. Sometimes academics moonlight as instructors in proprietary schools and very occasionally a school or a college will set up a vendor of its own. Except for these limited overlays, however, there is a sharp division between the proprietary system of language instruction and the formal educational sector. For most colleges and universities, the chasm is deep and unbridgeable. If a faculty member wants to denigrate a use-oriented style of language instruction being offered on the campus, he/she need only refer to it as "like Berlitz." And the belief that proprietary schools provide very low quality language instruction is very deeply held. However, the proprietary sector serves foreign language training needs that the formal educational system cannot or will not. It provides training on demand in time frames, in locales, and for purposes that fit the needs of use-oriented clients better than the campus-based, semester- or quarter-long units to which the procrustean bed of academic language instruction is fitted. One of the regular clients of proprietary vendors is DOD. It spends $2 million annually on proprietary vendors, mainly in the Washington area, who teach 500 DOD students. Other agencies like the FBI use vendors almost exclusively for their foreign language training. Even FSI uses vendors to cover languages for which there is no in-house teaching capacity. To a limited extent, instruction in the least commonly taught languages is also provided to government employees by university-based language and area studies programs acting as proprietary vendors, although unless government agencies want their employees trained as area specialists, they generally prefer the proprietaries. As a general rule, most agencies that need on-site training for overseas employees use in-country private vendors for that purpose.

The primary clients of the proprietary vendors are neither government nor the formal educational sector. They are the unaffiliated individual learners, ranging from tourists to professionals needing language skills in their work. However, it is corporate contracts that make many proprietaries profitable. The extent to which the corporate world uses commercial vendors for language training is one of the least understood aspects of our national foreign language training system. One thing is clear, however: if we are talking about corporate language training for international competitiveness, it is the proprietaries that are now providing this service. From the NFLC's interviews with corporate executives who manage the preparation of employees for overseas assignments it is clear that they are almost totally uninformed about language instruction in the government sector and they very rarely, if at all, call on the formal educational system to serve their language training needs. This is so even with respect to the less commonly taught languages where our university-based language and area studies programs have teaching resources unrivaled anywhere in the world. Some corporations—relatively few—set up language training shops within the company. Others tend to turn to vendors, not the formal educational system. Language skill is viewed by business executives as a commodity to be bought and sold like any other commodity, not an experiential skill like managerial ability to be built up carefully over a long period of time. As such, one turns to vendors, not educators, to supply it.

MANAGING THE NATIONAL SYSTEM

Let me turn now to a few suggestions as to how we might better manage the national system, a few glaring inadequacies that putting the whole system together reveals.

Problems of Lateral Discontinuities

If we think of the three different sets of language teaching enterprise as parts of our national language teaching system, the most striking feature is discontinuity. There is what might be called lateral discontinuity among the three segments—the formal educational system, the governmental language teaching centers, and the private vendors. They are not only autonomous but almost totally separate. They have remarkably little to do with each other. This is not surprising in that they have different functions and different clients. However, if we are to develop a national strategy for expanding and

improving our national foreign language system, at some point, attention must be paid to the promotion of better linkages among them. This is particularly true of links with the formal educational system. If we look at it in terms of a national strategy for use-oriented, rather than cultural awareness-oriented language learning, then the formal educational system should provide a basic level of skill in one or more foreign language that adults can later draw on for occupational or personal use. Curiously, we have no evidence as to whether it does or does not play that role. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it does not. The fact that corporations go almost entirely to private vendors for foreign language instruction for their employees speaks for itself. In large part, the government has given up on the formal educational system as a supplier of use-oriented language competencies. A very typical government assessment is contained in the following quotation from the memorandum dealing with the needs of the On-Site Inspection Agency (OSIA):

> American school systems do not lay an effective foundation for advanced-foreign language study either in government schools or in colleges and universities. In particular, language instruction in the civil sector is not proficiency-oriented. As a result: (1) without extensive reorientation, colleges and universities are poorly equipped to deal with proficiency requirements such as dictated by compliance inspections. (2) government language schools must begin language instruction at the beginning.[7]

There is, of course, somewhat less than full acceptance on the part of the academic community of such judgments of the greater effectiveness of government language training programs, and a deeply felt resistance to bend their system to serve government, particularly military needs. Nonetheless, at a minimum, this quotation indicates that there is a genuine need for a reversal of what has become a persistent pattern of mutual withdrawal at the interface between the two systems, government and academic.

Vertical Discontinuities

Much of the government's rejection of academic language instruction is a judgment about the low level of competency which graduates of such training are deemed to have. Quoting the OSIA report again, it notes:

> Data acquired in 1988 by the Educational Testing Service during calibration of its Russian Proficiency Test indicates that 4th and 5th year college students majoring in Russian have a median listening proficiency of Level 1+ and a median reading proficiency of Level 2.[8]

While I do not want to get into a debate about the legitimacy of this scale, anyone listening to taped samples of individuals performing at this level will agree that this is a fairly low level of performance. The 1+ level in listening comprehension is supposed to signify the ability to understand short conversations about survival needs and limited social demands. A level 2 reading comprehension should indicate someone who can read simple authentic material within a familiar context. It is true that graduate language majors and area specialists, particularly those who enroll in one of the overseas advanced language training centers, can get to a considerably higher level, sometimes to a level 3 or a little more—fairly complete comprehension in normal discourse and reading. The basic point, however, is that these performances usually come from individuals in the formal academic system who have a special need to master a language and an expectation of using it.

This is anything but characteristic of most language learners in the formal system. For most students, sticking with language instruction long enough to acquire a substantial amount of skill is the exception rather than the rule. A recent national cohort analysis of high school students found that out of all students enrolled in first year French, German, or Spanish only about 60 percent of them went on to the second level, and only 21 percent of the remainder went on to the third level.[9] On college campuses, we recently conducted an analysis of the transcripts of 8,692 students graduating in 1986 from a national sample of 32 colleges and universities. It showed that only about half the students enrolled in four-year institutions took any college-level language instruction at all, and of these about 40 percent took only the first year's work, a third took the equivalent of two years, and only about 15 percent took upper-level courses. In the more occupationally oriented two-year colleges, 73 percent took no language training at all, and of those who did, only 2 percent took an upper-level course.[10]

The rapid attrition rate in student enrollments across grades within each school level is compounded by major discontinuities between high school and college language instruction. It is usually left to the student to fit together the language training he/she has had at the various levels, and often they face in different directions. And when college-level language teachers encounter prior high school training in a student, the tendency is not to build on it but to excuse the student from the necessity of taking further work in that language.

This situation of rapid attrition and discontinuities across the system is well known to foreign language teachers, and is a source of immense frustration. Reaching a usable level of language competency requires, above all, time and cumulative effort, and the current system does not provide it. Students—and for that matter parents—often hold unrealistic expectations for miracles in too short a time period. Teachers also know that the second year of language learning is characteristically less exciting for students. The quick progress made in the early stages settles down to the near drudgery in slowly reaching the next plateau. And since our system is almost entirely demand driven, holding student volunteers to the task of language learning calls for extraordinary motivational skill on the part of the teacher. It is small wonder that some teachers battle for a language requirement. They find this, of course, a two-edged sword. The trade-off for commandeering substantial amounts of students' time—although the usual two-year

requirement is not very much time—is to get classes in which there is a high proportion of foot-dragging students. In our national sample survey of 400 institutions of higher learning[11] 68 percent of our universities and 40 percent of baccalaureate colleges have a language requirement for graduation for some students. Even these minimal requirements normally reach only a fraction of the total student body. Many fewer, only 9 percent and 22 percent of universities and colleges respectively, have a foreign language requirement for all students. Relatively few community colleges (13 percent) have a foreign language requirement, and none of these applies to all of their students. The message is clear. Given the predominance of low-level learners enrolled in foreign language instruction, the non-use-oriented goals of language learning need special attention. On the other hand, if the formal educational system is to provide the reservoir for use-oriented foreign language instruction, then more attention must be paid to providing a larger number of students with a clearly demarcated track through and beyond the current system, one that will make their language learning more continuous across the breaks in the system—between high school and college for instance or between domestic and overseas language study. There is little evidence that high school-learned language skills are interlinked comfortably with collegiate language learning. Nor is language learning during study abroad well integrated with domestic training. The data from the ACE national survey of colleges and universities indicated that typically the level of language courses taken before study abroad was very low and that in very few institutions was any provision made for students returning from abroad to use their increased language skills. And overall, there is little evidence that any combination of levels provides them enough language competency to provide a good base on which later use-oriented instruction can build.

The confinement of language instruction to lower skill levels is not just characteristic of our formal educational system. It is characteristic of the system as a whole. Within the federal government, DLI routinely trains students to a 1+ level, although the CIA and NSA are reputed to go much higher. An in-house report by Monteagle Sterns[12] on language training for the foreign service lamented the low levels of language competency of our diplomats compared with those from other countries. A similar indictment appeared in Senator Paul Simon's questioning of FSI officials in the September 21, 1988, hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The proprietary vendors are of little help. With few exceptions, all of their training is focused on the first stages of language learning, what is referred to as the survival stage. And both the corporations and the government tend to depend upon native speakers, rather than school-learned language skills, for genuinely high levels of language competency.

The national language system, therefore, needs not only lateral integration among the subsystems, but articulation across levels and within levels within each subsystem, and a determination to bring a larger number of students to a higher level of proficiency.

Shifting Our Western European Bias

If we are to prepare our citizenry realistically for the next century and not the last, we must diversify our language offerings. In general, our formal educational system is fixated on French, German, or Spanish, where 90 percent of our enrollments lie. We do have an extensive governmentally nurtured set of university-based programs that teach some 90 languages of the world, but they are primarily oriented to teaching advanced language and area specialists. We clearly need to extend instruction in the non-European languages more broadly throughout the educational system. The only non-Western European languages for which this has begun to happen are Russian, Japanese, and Chinese. Russian, for instance, has a somewhat greater spread with collegiate level enrollments of 32,365 in 1986 and high school enrollments of 6,405 in 1985. Recently, there has been something of a surge in enrollments, but nobody knows what the increase has amounted to. The language with the highest rate of enrollment increase is Japanese, where enrollments have tripled within the past five years, but if one omits enrollments at the University of Hawaii and Brigham Young University, the total enrollments in Japanese are still very small. Below the collegiate level, there are about 300 high schools currently teaching Japanese and 177 teaching Chinese, and experimental programs for Japanese instruction have begun to appear in the elementary schools.

The government language schools tend to have a somewhat wider spread of languages, although their sometimes narrow definition of use-oriented gives various agencies a somewhat peculiar profile of languages they teach. For instance, the Department of Defense language training school tends to focus on recent or projected military adversaries and thus underemphasizes countries like Japan and most of Africa. Others are bound by legal restrictions requiring the clear demonstration of agency use before training can be taken.

What the situation is among the proprietary vendors is anybody's guess. The general impression is that some of the private vendors teach the non-Western European languages, but European languages still make up the bulk of their trade, and in the non-Western languages their services are usually quite limited in scope and normally operate at a very low level of skill.

Surely one of the major needs of the entire system is an improvement in our capacity to teach more of the major languages of the world to more of our citizens. It tends to be limited at the present time to the use-oriented sector of our language instructional system. It clearly needs a greater representation in the formal educational system if we are to prepare our citizenry realistically for the next century and not the last.

There are a number of systemic changes that need to be put into place to make this possible. Here, I can only give a few illustrative suggestions.

1. Most of the less commonly taught languages do not have the rich store of texts, dictionaries, grammars, authentic materials, etc., that are available for instructional use in the European languages. Filling the gap is now a cottage industry carried on separately in dozens of languages by dozens of individual scholars in their spare time. Or materials are prepared in the government or proprietary schools and never emerge for use in the formal educational system. A coordinated materials production and curricular development system is needed that facilitates individual effort and provides for common sharing of technologies and resources.

2. The practical problem in providing instruction in most of the less commonly taught languages is that teaching resources are now and are likely to remain concentrated in a few sites, while the limited demand for instruction is dispersed and intermittent. This means that heavy emphasis should be put on the development of individualized instruction and teaching at a distance strategies, on centralized training facilities open to all, and on carrying language learning to the workplace instead of insisting that individuals leave their jobs to come to a school to study a language.

3. The essential component for a national plan must be the training of teachers. The dysfunctional, uncoordinated scurrying to find teachers of Japanese, for instance, to meet the exploding demand for instruction will saddle us with a low-quality Japanese teaching system for years to come. Now is the time to upgrade and reinforce the quality of the current instructional system and to train top-quality teachers for our expanding needs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I have tried to sketch in some of the broad structural features of our national foreign language teaching system, avoiding any discussion of the nature of pedagogical practice or the relative merits of one or the other element in the national system. In characterizing the national system, I have emphasized one particular goal, the preparation of Americans for real-life use of a foreign language. While, particularly in the formal educational system, there are other goals of language education such as general intellectual broadening, deparochialization, or gaining a deeper appreciation of one's own language, the current debates about national policy stress more instrumental ends such as improving our economic competitiveness or making our citizens more able to deal with others around the world. These debates direct our attention to a different goal: language education for utilization in adult life. I have pointed out that, with a few exceptions, the formal educational system currently serves this goal only indirectly. Were it to do so more directly, more attention would have to be paid to:

1. identifying a wider variety of uses both on and off the campus toward which language education would point;

2. the articulation of language learning experiences for students across educational and course levels so that it becomes more cumulative for individual learners;

3. the attainment of a higher level of skill by those students with the capacity to learn and the greatest likelihood of future use of a foreign language skill;

4. the introduction of greater flexibility in the timing, availability, and mode of instruction;

5. the provision of opportunities for language skill maintenance for students after they graduate; and

6. an expansion in the formal system's capacity to provide language instruction for adults when a real need for the use of a foreign language skill arises.

At present, instruction directed toward a concrete expectation of use of a foreign language skill takes place primarily in two other segments of the national system largely unconnected with our schools and colleges—the government language training schools and a host of proprietary vendors of language instruction. The former tend to serve the limited clientele of federal government employees. Nothing now serves the needs of state or local government employees. The foreign language training needs of business employees are occasionally handled by programs managed by corporations themselves. More frequently, they are contracted out to private schools and tutors, or individual employees use commercially available texts and tapes. The foreign language needs of other adults, whether for occupational use or for private purposes, are served by the same network of proprietary language training vendors.

If we as a nation are to move forward toward a more foreign language competent society, systematic national planning and development have to occur in all three systems. Common standards have to be set, strategies for matching individual needs to appropriate training facilities have to be established, the subsystems must be coordinated and articulated so that individuals can move among them with relative ease and with some expectation that the skills acquired in any mix of language learning environments will be both cumulative and useful. And two things are needed above all. Direct national attention must be paid to raising the occupational demand for and utilization of foreign language skills in the society as a whole, and the level of language skills taught and acquired in the all segments of the system needs to be radically raised.

NOTES

1. Carol Fixman, *The Foreign Language Needs of U.S.-Based Corporations* (Washington, D. C.: The National Foreign Language Center, May 1989).

2. Peter W. Kozumplik, "Memorandum on Language Requirement Study for On-Site Inspection Agency, 20 December 1988" (Washington, D.C.: Defense Language Institute, ATFL-NCR, December 20, 1988).

3. David Wilkins, who reviewed this issue for the Council on Europe, concluded that the evidence for this function of language learning is very slim. See David Wilkins, "The Educational Value of Foreign Language Learning," CC-GP12 (87) 10 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1987).

4. A brief summary of this system, with particular emphasis on the Department of Defense, is contained in Kozumplik's report to the On-Site Inspection Agency, already cited; and William Bader et al., *Defense Intelligence: Foreign Area/Language Needs and Academe* (Washington, D.C.: SRI International, 1983).

5. For a somewhat self-congratulatory comparison of government, mainly DLI, and academic language instruction, see Ray Clifford, "Language Teaching in the Federal Government, A Personal Perspective," in Richard D. Lambert, ed., *Foreign Language Instruction, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 490 (March 1987).

6. Frank C. Abbot, "Intensive Language Programs in the West, Report of a Survey" (Boulder, Colo.: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1988, mimeo).

7. Kozumplik, Enclosure 2.

8. Kozumplik, Enclosure 2.

9. William B. Fetters and Jeffrey A. Owings, "High School and Beyond: Foreign Language Course Taking by 1980 High School Sophomores Who Graduated in 1982," LSB 84-4-16 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, April 1984).

10. Richard D. Lambert, *International Studies and the Undergraduate* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1989).

11. See Charles Anderson, *International Studies for Undergraduates, 1987: Operations and Opinions*, Higher Education Panel Report 76 (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, September 1988).

12. Monteagle Sterns, *Report on Hard Language Proficiency in the Foreign Service: Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, 1986).

About the National Foreign Language Center

The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) is dedicated to improving the foreign language competency of Americans. NFLC emphasizes the formulation of public policy to make our language teaching systems responsive to national needs in international competitiveness and foreign relations. Its primary tools in carrying out this objective are:

•**Surveys**—NFLC conducts surveys to collect previously unavailable information on issues concerning national strength and productivity in foreign language instruction, and our foreign language needs in the service of the economic, diplomatic, and security interests of the nation.

•**National Policy Planning Groups**—In order to address major foreign language policy issues, NFLC convenes national planning groups that bring together users of foreign language services and representatives of the language instructional delivery systems in formal education, the government, and the for-profit sector.

•**Research**—NFLC conducts research on innovative, primarily individual-oriented strategies of language learning to meet the nation's foreign language needs of the future.

The results of these surveys, discussions, and research are made available through NFLC's publications, such as these *Occasional Papers*, and they form the basis of fresh policy recommendations addressed to national leaders and decision-makers.

NFLC was established in 1987 as part of The Johns Hopkins University with funding from four private foundations: The Exxon Education Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Pew Memorial Trusts.